



Child Abuse Prevention Conference

Remarks by Gov. Jan Brewer

Friday July 18, 2014, 12:30 p.m.

Renaissance Glendale Hotel, Solana E Conference Room

Thank you, Rebecca ... and thank you all for this great honor.

As you know, this year I signed into law historic child safety reform that will change and fundamentally FIX how Arizona protects its vulnerable children.

It could not have happened without the devoted efforts of the men and women in this very room

And I am proud that it happened on my watch.

The credit truly belongs to the dedicated, hard-working people who have committed their careers to protecting our state's abused and neglected children.

Arizona, like so many other states, has long had a broken child safety system.

Despite repeated attempts to tweak the former Child Protective Services over the years to fix those faults, fundamental problems remained.

A couple of years ago, in response to a recommendation from a task force I appointed, we established the Office of Child Welfare Investigations.

It was that unit that discovered the 6,000-plus “Not Investigated” cases and immediately alerted my office.

Upon learning of that awful discovery, I knew the entire system had to be completely and permanently transformed -- No more Band-Aids. No more backlogs, bureaucracy or blurred focus.

So, I made it my priority to reverse this long-standing crisis ... and implement long-LASTING change.

I asked the Legislature and stakeholders from across the state to work with me to create a Cabinet-level Department of Child Safety, whose director reports to the governor.

The newsystem has more resources ... more transparency ... more outside monitoring and accountability ... a new culture ... and a more focused mission.

It also has a new director ... an enormously capable one at that ... Charles Flanagan.

I have the utmost confidence in his ability to guide this restructuring process and lead this department to success – turning it into a national model for protecting children.

So many, many good people were involved in turning this around – including many of you here today.

The people who helped develop the system include law enforcement experts, child advocates, social service professionals, budget wonks, legislators, a county attorney, my staff, and many others.

As governor, I made sure they had not only the resources they needed, but also the assurance that I was 100 percent behind this effort -- and that I would do whatever it took to enact real and meaningful reform for the children of our state.

After months of hard work, our reforms passed – via two bills in a special session -- with overwhelming, bipartisan support.

This was truly a group effort – a huge group effort – and I applaud and am truly grateful to each and every person involved.

I do, though, believe in the power of one.

Like one child safety caseworker who spots potential for abuse and works to protect an innocent child.

I am pleased to say that many incredibly dedicated and professional people in the Department of Child Safety and elsewhere are just like that ... working hard every day to protect Arizona's children.

What a tremendously important and difficult job those in our state child safety system have!

I believe in the power of one child safety worker who is equipped and trained to make sound life-preserving decisions to ensure the safety of our children.

I believe in the power of one volunteer, or social service professional, who helps distressed parents and families cope with hardships they face to prevent any future harm to children and families.

I believe in the power of one child advocate who remains attentive to the functioning of the system to ensure the best outcomes for children and families.

And how about the power of one neighbor, or family member, who refuses to turn a blind eye when they witness a child being neglected or abused?

We've certainly seen three powerful examples of the valuable contributions of individuals in the Hope, Help and Healings awards today.

Talk about people who take responsibility and make positive things happen! There are three excellent models!

I applaud them – and all of you here -- for the difficult and important job you do.

Our children are so much better off with you on their side.

Thank you very much for this great honor, and thank you also for what so many of you did to make child safety reform happen in Arizona.

God bless you all for what you do every day to safeguard our state's most precious resource – our children.